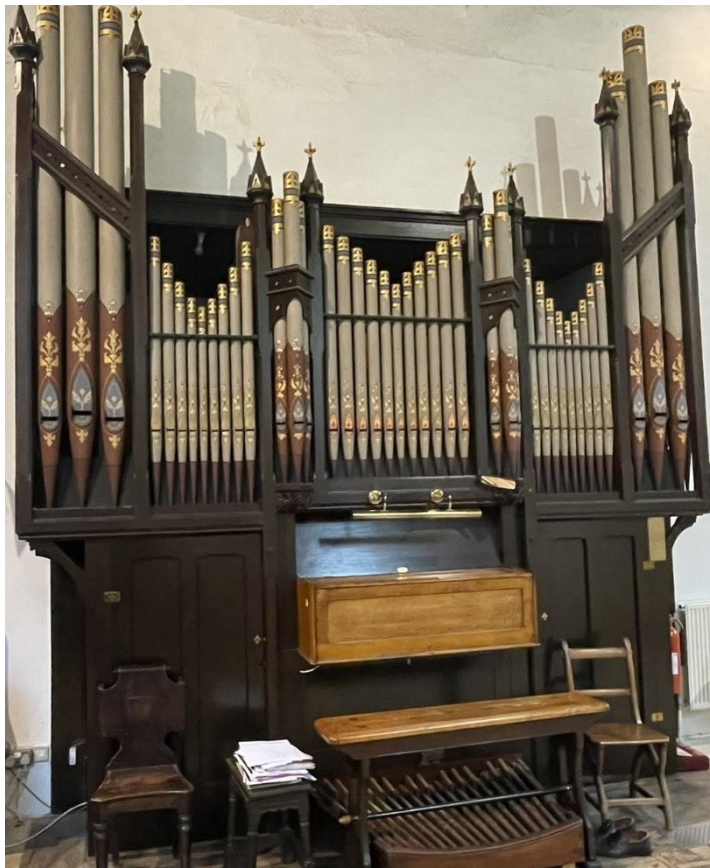


The church organ at St James the Great, Gretton



The church's organ sits in a small extension, built into the north wall of the chancel. It is a two manual organ plus pedals, with 564 pipes (ranging from one inch to sixteen feet long), with 13 stops, various couplers, and a swell pedal.

Its origins are a bit of a mystery. The Stamford Mercury of 3 December 1880 reported that the 'organ built by [Bishop and Son](#) of London was used for the first time' at a special dedication service and concert with 'rapt' audience. It seems generally

accepted that the organ was at least second hand, and a plate on the organ states that it was 'improved by Bishop and Starr, 1871' - and it would make sense to have the original builders do any maintenance and modifications on arrival at Gretton.



James chapman Bishop established his organ building company in 1795 and the company changed its name over time as sons and partners came

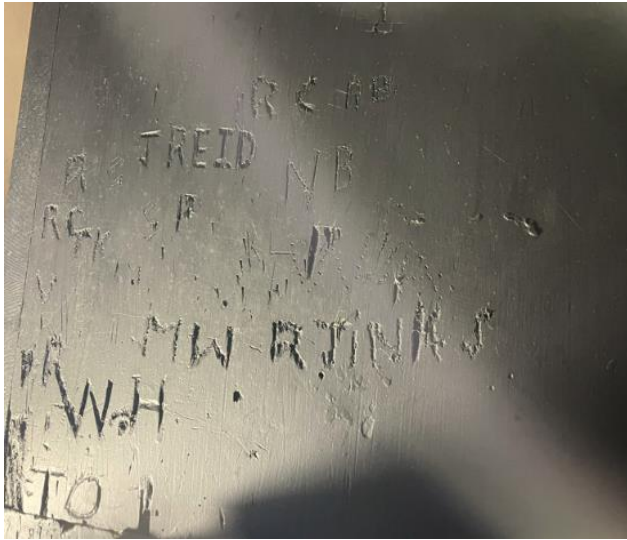
and went. If modification happened on arrival in Gretton, this 1871 plate could therefore suggest the organ actually arrived here some nine years before 1880. And as we know the dates of name changes in the company, and if the newspaper's use of 'Bishop and Son' is correct, that would date the original organ's build to around the 1850. However, Bishop and Son has no records of our organ other than repairs and maintenance after arrival at Gretton – their first record is of 'annual tuning' in 1883.

Of course, Bishop and Starr might have 'improved' another maker's organ and removed the original builder's plate; old screw holes above the 1871 plate might indicate an earlier plate. Which brings us to another story, popular in Gretton in the early 20th century, that the organ came from St Luke's, Leicester, where it was, allegedly 'already second hand'. St Luke's records (the church was demolished in 1949, although its echoes remain as in the names of medical centre and school) say their organ from this period was built by [Joshua Porritt](#).

No other identifiers or records have been found except a British Institute of Organ Studies survey report from 1989 that claims that the organ was installed in 1871 in Gretton by Bishop and Starr, and originated in St Luke's Leicester, its second home...so far so good... but was originally built by '?[Bevington](#) c1860'. It's not clear what the evidence for this is, unless somebody found some documents now lost, or that an organ part peculiar to Bevington's was seen – but, again, now lost.

Whatever its background, it is clearly a wonderful, beautiful and historic thing, that's been at Gretton for at least 150 years. Maybe its upcoming refurbishment will reveal further historical clues.

The organ chamber, incidentally, officially dates to sometime after 1880, as [Faculty](#) was only applied for from Peterborough Diocese then. So in theory, the chamber it was built at least one and possibly ten years after the organ's arrival! This seems unlikely, and as Ian Henderson, a past organist who did much of research into the organ's history cited here, noted, this probably simply illustrates a long-standing Gretton tradition of 'build first and ask permission later'.



The churchwardens' accounts from 1881 include a note of payment to an 'organ blower'. Hidden around the side of the organ, near to where the hand pump would have been, beyond where an electric blower now sits, are some scratched names, presumably of naughty choirboys, some of them recognisable as remarkably

similar to those of current villagers. The electric blower was fitted in July 1942.

The organ seems to have replaced an earlier harmonium, which is first mentioned in 1866 when the churchwardens' accounts record that 'it was further agreed that Thomas Warner receive 50/- per annum for playing the harmonium' - and a decade before that there must have been a church band as there are records of Thomas and others being paid for 'Bace (*sic*) and violin strings and playing in the church', and earlier still, in 1848, 'Warne for fiddle strings 4/6'.

Sources

This account is based mainly on the research notes of Ian Henderson from the 1990s (held by Gretton Local History Society), including correspondence with the various organ builders, the British Institute of Organ Studies ([BIOS](#)) and searches of their various registers and archives

Churchwardens' accounts and reports – also held by Gretton Local History Society

Websites for organ builders – hyperlinked in the text